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A PRACTICAL COURSE IN PHONETICS

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The demand for the introduction of phonetics into our modern-language courses, which has been gradually gaining ground in recent years, is likely to receive a new impetus from the fact that the Committee of Ten of the National Education Association on the reorganization of the work in modern languages in our secondary schools is recommending phonetics as a foundation for our modern-language work.

In view of the discussions on phonetics in our educational magazines and books on methods, it is a little difficult to see how the subject can ever be introduced satisfactorily into our language courses. One is invariably left with the impression that, although scientific instruction in phonetics is not demanded, nevertheless the ideal set up is practically impossible of attainment because of the time that would necessarily be involved in the thorough training advocated, and because of the inability of a large number of teachers to give instruction in phonetics on account of lack of training in the subject.

A question immediately arises in the mind of the person seriously considering the introduction of phonetics into the modern-language work: Is a perfect pronunciation so all-important that one is justified in devoting so much time to its acquisition? Should we not be content with a reasonably good pronunciation, which might be secured with a reasonable expenditure of time, and not neglect in the limited time at our disposal the more important features of modern-language work for the less important?

It is with the recognition of the desirability of a reasonably accurate *Aussprache* (such as the Committee of Ten of the National Education Association, as a matter of fact, is advocating) that a course in what might be termed "practical phonetics" is given in connection with some of the work in German in the University of

Chicago High School. Practically all the work is done through imitation. Special directions for producing the correct sounds are given only in individual cases where unusual difficulty is experienced. The first five or six recitations of the course are devoted entirely to drill in the pronunciation of individual sounds or words. After that, this drill is reduced to five or ten minutes daily and in the course of a few weeks is eliminated altogether. A short drill in oral reading is given in connection with each new reading-lesson. If the work at the beginning of the year has been carefully done this drill need consume no more time than is usually given to the oral reading of the new lesson. By thus emphasizing the correct pronunciation of all new material and constantly correcting false pronunciation, the new *Aussprache* gradually becomes a habit on the part of the pupil.

On account of the phonetic spelling of the German language it is considered unnecessary to use the phonetic symbols. Instead of this, two typewritten sheets containing the German vowels and consonants with numerous examples of words containing these sounds are placed in the hands of the pupil. Extracts from this outline are here given:

DIE DEUTSCHEN LANGEN UND KURZEN VOKALE

- ä kam, Hahn, nahm, Knabe, haben, Samen, fragen, Vater, schlafen.
- ö Mann, Tante, fand, Hand, krank, Hammer, Arm, Garten, Lampe, Land.
- ë geben, nehmen, sehen, gehen, Wege, beten, jener, treten, streben.

e IN VOR- UND NACHSILBEN

- e Mitte, Blume, finden, Gaben, Apfel, Gipfel, besehen, gesehen.
- er Vater, Mutter, Kinder, Zimmer, Hammer, erfinden, erkennen, erhalten.

DIE UMLAUTE

- ä Hähne, Kähne, säen, Säge, Säle, Ähre, Fähnrich, ähnlich, Pläne.
- ă Männer, Gäste, länger, ärmer, wärmen, härter, älter, kälter.
- ö böse, Söhne, schön, töten, Höfe, mögen, lösen, Hönir, hören.

DIE DIPTHONGE

- au Haus, Maus, laufen, hinaus, kaufen, brauchen, Trauben, faul.
- ei weiss, heissen, Meissen, treiben, schreiben, Weile, bleiben.

DIE KONSONANTEN

- b beide, geben; b=p in gab, gib, hob, lobt, hebt, lieblich.
- d das, Kinder; d=t in Kind, Sand, fand, findst, mündlich.

The long and short vowels, the umlaut vowels, and diphthongs with the glottal catch are taught first. The fact that the German long vowels are longer than the corresponding English vowels and that the short vowels must be made very short and spoken with "pressure" is emphasized. Indeed, throughout the work it is impressed on the mind of the pupils that German cannot be spoken in the indifferent and careless manner peculiar to the American, but that effort and energy are required to secure the vigorous enunciation which characterizes the German. In connection with the work in vowels especial attention is directed to the *e* in final syllables as in *Bote*, *Regen*, and *Löffel* and in words ending in *er* as *Vater*.

Among the consonants the difference between *b*, *d*, and *g* in initial and medial, and in final position, is continually pointed out and a distinction between the voiced and unvoiced *s* is insisted upon. A correct pronunciation of *ch* and *z* is essential, but seldom offers any real difficulty to the pupil. More difficult are the *r* and *l*. The front trilled *r* is taught, as it is almost impossible to acquire the uvular *r*. Even this front *r*, so easy for most pupils, offers an almost insurmountable obstacle to a few. Since months of practice sometimes prove insufficient for the acquisition of this *r*, those pupils who, after reasonable efforts, still fail to produce it are excused from further drill. The final syllable *er*, as in *Vater*, is taught as a very open *ĕ*, the *r* sound frequently disappearing entirely. When all this material has been given, attention is drawn to the German *l*.

Although all of the foregoing elements must be included in this work, the greatest stress is laid on those sounds which differ most from the corresponding English sounds. If those elements in our enunciation of German which most impress the German as being "American" are eliminated, much is done in the way of securing the foreign accent. The elements in the American's *Aussprache* that strike the German most forcibly as being incorrect or "American" are the three consonants *l*, *r*, *s*, the diphthong *au*, the final syllable *er*, and the long vowels *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. These sounds indeed stand out so prominently as distinguishing features of the American accent that insistence on accuracy in the enunciation of these

alone will practically transform the pupil's *Aussprache*. Fortunately a reasonably accurate enunciation of these important elements is easily secured.

Since the results indicated above can be attained with such a small investment of time and energy, why not make the aim in our work in phonetics a more practicable one? Courses giving prospective teachers this training could be easily introduced into our training schools for teachers. True, the work here advocated would differ from that now usually given, inasmuch as the practical side would have to be emphasized more than it has been. The teacher-student should not only receive training in the production of the individual sounds but should be drilled in pronunciation in connection with oral reading and speaking, until the German *Aussprache* is at least approximated. Students who have been taught to produce the individual sounds but who continue to speak and read with the American accent, as is now so often the case, cannot be expected to teach the German enunciation. It requires persistent effort to overcome the old tendencies and it is only when the new *Aussprache* has become habitual on the part of the teacher that phonetic instruction can be satisfactorily given by him. In the teachers' colleges and normal schools a more general introduction of courses in phonetics combining practical with scientific features will therefore be necessary before a large number of teachers in our secondary schools can comply with the demand that phonetic instruction be incorporated in our modern-language work.